



SUCCESS STORY

Dialogue Heals Hatreds, Training Promotes Partnerships



Kalenjins and Kikuyus attend business development training after a series of dialogues allowed them to move beyond mutual hatred.



Former enemies embrace at a Kalenjin-Kikuyu dialogue.

OTI/Kenya

The U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program in Kenya seeks to facilitate enduring stability based on national unity. The program will assist Kenyan state and non-state actors to more fully exercise their capacities to meet the following objectives:

- 1. Promote and enable broad-based recovery from the 2007–2008 election-related violence, and*
- 2. Prompt steps to address the underlying causes of instability.*

November 2008 – Two women are developing a business plan at an Office of Transition Initiatives–funded business skills training session in the town of Burnt Forest near Eldoret. Looking at them, you wouldn't know that a few weeks ago they were sworn enemies who spat at the sight of each other.

A middle-aged Kikuyu lady talks excitedly about her plans with her Kalenjin neighbor. They look forward to selling their vegetables at the Burnt Forest Market they are rebuilding with the Town Council and support from OTI. Their association is a consequence of the third OTI grant to promote reconciling dialogues in the town, which was hard-hit by the 2007–2008 post-election violence.

When OTI first initiated the dialogues, the Kikuyu woman bitterly opposed talking to the Kalenjin “dogs” who had threatened to kill her, burned her farm, and stolen her animals. Her husband was worried about being seen as a traitor by other Kikuyus, but remembering that the Kalenjin had spared their lives, he felt dialogue was the only way to prevent future violence.

Initial discussions were marked by anger and resentment. The Kikuyu believed that the Kalenjin, envious of the Kikuyu's economic advantages, had premeditated violence against them. The Kalenjin in turn were convinced that the Kikuyu had spread false accusations about Kalenjin orchestration of the violence.

The women have vivid memories of the first dialogue. After listening to the Kikuyu accusingly tell her story, the Kalenjin said: “My home was burned and I live in a camp... Had I planned violence, wouldn't I have hidden my property or fled?” The women realized they were both victims. Eight meetings later, she and her husband have no bitter feelings for the youth who threatened their lives and are working with their neighbors to rebuild their community.

“Since the dialogues started, the atmosphere in Burnt Forest has changed,” says the Burnt Forest Town Councilor. “People are no longer afraid to walk alone. They even buy and sell across ethnic lines.” He also said that the sessions had restored peace in a way that the neither the Provincial Kenyan Administration nor the police and military could.